

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL POSS DUPE

PAGE 01 TUNIS 07307 01 OF 02 270908Z

12

ACTION SCCT-01

INFO OCT-01 AF-04 EUR-12 NEA-06 ISO-00 IO-10 CIAE-00

DODE-00 PM-03 H-01 INR-05 L-02 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01

RSC-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 SY-04 USSS-00 EB-07

FAA-00 DOTE-00 /087 W

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R 261600Z NOV 74

FM AMEMBASSY TUNIS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7538

INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS

AMEMBASSY AMMAN

USINT BAGHDAD

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE

AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY RABAT

AMEMBASSY ROME

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI

AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM

USCINCEUR

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 TUNIS 7307

USCINCEUR FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PINS, EG,SF, OGEN

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PAGE 02 TUNIS 07307 01 OF 02 270908Z

SUBJ: VC-10 HIJACKING: "POST MORTEM" OBSERVATIONS

1. SUMMARY: EMBASSY PROVIDED TUNISIANS WITH TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE BUT OTHERWISE KEPT ITS INVOLVEMENT TO A MINIMUM. HIJACKERS MANIFESTED STRONG ANTAGONISM TOWARD U.S. SOME SUSPICION EXISTS THAT QADHAFI MAY HAVE MASTERMINDED OR AT LEAST COOPERATED IN OPERATION. ALTHOUGH FIVE CAIRO-BASED TERRORISTS WERE NOT KEEN ON JOINING THEIR PALESTINIAN COMRADES, ONCE HERE THEY MAINTAINED SOLIDARITY WITH THEM. HIJACKERS ESTABLISHED CLOSE RELATIONSHIPS WITH PASSENGERS AND CREW, DESPITE TENSIONS AND THREAT OF DEATH. BRITISH, AS WELL AS OTHER ARAB GOVERNMENTS, CONTRIBUTED TO TUNISIAN GOVERNMENT DECISION TO BEND TO HIJACKERS' DEMANDS. EFFORTS TO LOCATE ARAB GOVERNMENT WHICH WOULD ACCEPT AIRCRAFT WITH ELEVEN TERRORISTS ABOARD PROVED UNAVAILING. TUNISIAN MINISTER OF INTERIOR IMPRESSED LISTENERS WITH HIS NEGOTIATING TECHNIQUES. SOME EVIDENCE SUGGESTS THAT HIJACKERS WERE DEADLY SERIOUS ABOUT BLOWING UP AIRCRAFT WITH PERSONS ABOARD IF THEIR DEMANDS NOT MET. WHAT HAPPENS NEXT TO TERRORISTS IS SUBJECT OF SEPTTEL. END SUMMARY.

2. EMBASSY INVOLVEMENT. EMBASSY KEPT ITS INVOLVEMENT TO A MINIMUM DESPITE CONSIDERABLE TUNISIAN GOVERNMENT PRESSURE ON US AT EARLY STAGE TO DO MORE. WE REFUSED TUNISIAN REQUEST FOR LOAN OF MARINES FOR CONTINGENCY USE AS SHARPSHOOTERS, AS WELL AS LOAN OF U.S. MILITARY PERSONNEL ATTACHED TO THE EMBASSY FOR UNSPECIFIED "SECURITY" ASSISTANCE. BUT WE DID FOLLOWING: (A) FURNISHED TUNISIANS WITH FBI GUIDELINES FOR HANDLING HIJACKERS PASSED TO US BY DEPARTMENT: (B) AGREED TO TRANSMIT MESSAGE FROM FOREIGN MINISTER TO SECRETARY KISSINGER CONCERNING TUNISIAN DESIRE FOR OUR INTERVENTION IN CAIRO TO OBTAIN RELEASE OF THIRTEEN EGYPTIAN-HELD TERRORISTS: (C) PROVIDED LOW-PROFILE CONSULTATIVE SERVICES OF REGIONAL SECURITY OFFICER: (D) LOANED "FLAK" JACKETS TO TUNISIAN SECURITY FORCES. WE WERE SURPRISED THAT TUNISIAN PRESS FRONT-PAGED PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA'S TELEPHONE CALL TO AMBASSADOR MORNING FOLLOWING PLANE'S ARRIVAL AND ASSUME THAT IT WAS PUBLICIZED, AS WERE BOURGUIBA'S CALLS TO SADAT, HASSAN AND BOUMEDIENE, IN ORDER DEMONSTRATE BOURGUIBA'S BEING ACTIVE. AMBASSADOR MADE POINTS TO PRESIDENT, FOREIGN MINISTER AND OTHER TUNISIAN AUTHORITIES THAT USG POLICY IS CONFIDENTIAL
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PAGE 03 TUNIS 07307 01 OF 02 270908Z

TO AVOID CAPITULATING TO BLACKMAIL AND THAT IN PARTICULAR, USG WOULD VIEW WITH GREAT CONCERN RELEASE OF KHARTOUM EIGHT. HIJACKERS' ANTAGONISTIC ATTITUDES TOWARDS U.S. WERE REVEALED IN THEIR CONTENTION THAT MURDERED PASSENGER WAS AN AMERICAN AND THEIR REPORTED SIMULTANEOUS EXPRESSION OF DESIRE THAT AMBASSADOR COME TO AIRPORT TOWER. LATER THEY DEMANDED THAT AMBASSADOR MAKE PUBLIC DECLARATION OF SUPPORT FOR PALESTINIAN "RIGHTS" AND THAT IF HE FAILED TO COMPLY, HIJACKERS WOULD RETALIATE BY ATTACKING AMERICAN INSTALLATIONS. FORTUNATELY, TWO YOUNG AMERICAN PASSENGERS ON PLANE WERE

UNHARMED (ONE HAD GUITAR ON WHICH GUERILLA PLAYED PALESTINIAN SONGS).

3. REASONS WHY PLANE LANDED AT TUNIS. TUNISIAN AUTHORITIES TOLD US THAT REASON THEY RELUCTANTLY ALLOWED AIRCRAFT TO

LAND AT TUNIS WAS INFORMATION CONVEYED FROM AIRCRAFT THAT SERIOUSLY WOUNDED PASSENGER WAS ON BOARD, AND THREAT TO BLOW UP AIRCRAFT IN MID-AIR IF PERMISSION TO LAND REFUSED. PILOT, HOWEVER, INFORMED BRITISH OFFICIALS AFTER HE LEFT AIRCRAFT THAT HE WAS FORCED TO TELL TUNIS TOWER, WHILE FLYING OVERHEAD WITH HIJACKER'S GUN AT HIS BACK, THAT HE ONLY HAD FUEL ENOUGH FOR FIFTEEN MORE MINUTES OF FLYING. IN FACT, SINCE PLANE HAD REFUELED IN TRIPOLI, TANKS WERE ALMOST FULL AND PILOT CONSIDERED THAT LANDING UNDER THESE CIRCUMSTANCES WAS RISKY. THERE IS SPECULATION AMONG TUNISIANS THAT QADHAFI, NOT IRAQIS, WAS BEHIND HIJACKING EFFORT AND THAT IT WAS HE WHO DECIDED PLANE SHOULD LAND AT TUNIS IN ORDER TO EMBARRASS TUNISIANS. FACT THAT AIRCRAFT HAD BEEN GRANTED PERMISSION TO LAND AND REFUEL IN TRIPOLI AND THAT IRAQI-SUPPORTED ABU NIDAL GROUP HAS ALLEGEDLY DENIED ANY CONNECTION WITH HIJACKERS CONTRIBUTED TO THIS THEORY.

4. RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN DIFFERENT PALESTINIAN ELEMENTS. QUESTION HAS BEEN RAISED AS TO WHETHER FIVE CAIRO-BASED TERRORISTS WERE CONTENT TO JOIN THEIR COMRADES IN THESE CIRCUMSTANCES. EGYPTIAN GOVERNMENT HAS TOLD AMBASSADOR EILTS THAT THEY WERE NOT RPT NOT. ABU IYAD SUPPORTED THIS THESIS IN TALK WITH BRITISH FONOFF REPRESENTATIVE CRAIG, CONTENDING THAT CAIRO-BASED FIVE ARE CLOSER TO PLO THAN TO ABU MAHMUD GROUP. HOWEVER, TUNISIAN EFFORTS TO APPEAL TO THE HEAD OF
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PAGE 04 TUNIS 07307 01 OF 02 270908Z

THE CAIRO FIVE (TONY HARAKI) TO MODIFY THE HIJACKERS' DEMANDS PROVED UNAVAILING. ALSO, BRITISH PILOT CONTENTED THAT CAIRO FIVE SEEMED TO BE JUST AS ENTHUSIASTIC ABOUT BLOWING UP PLANE AS FOUR HIJACKERS. ONE REPORT HAS IT THAT KILLING OF GERMAN PASSENGER WAS DONE BY YOUSEF, THE MOST FANATIC HIJACKER (TUNIS 7234), WITHOUT APPROVAL OF THE OTHERS. (ONE PASSENGER REPORTED THAT GERMAN ANTAGONIZED HIJACKERS BY HIS BOISTEROUS, CRITICAL BEHAVIOR WHILE UNDER INFLUENCE OF ALCOHOL. SOME OTHER PASSENGERS ARE REPORTED AS SAYING HE WAS QUIET, GIVING NO OFFENSE.) NEAR THE END OF NEGOTIATIONS, WHEN YOUSEF WAS TALKING OVER VOICE RADIO IN EXCITED FASHION TO MINISTER OF INTERIOR BELKHODJA, LATTER ASKED TO SPEAK TO HIJACKER LEADER MARWAN INF EFFORT TO TALK TO SOMEBODY MORE REASONABLE.

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PAGE 01 TUNIS 07307 02 OF 02 270852Z

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INFO OCT-01 AF-04 EUR-12 NEA-06 ISO-00 IO-10 CIAE-00

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RSC-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 SY-04 USSS-00 EB-07

FAA-00 DOTE-00 /087 W

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R 261600Z NOV 74

FM AMEMBASSY TUNIS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7539

INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS

AMEMBASSY AMMAN

USINT BAGHDAD

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

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5. RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN HIJACKERS AND PASSENGERS AND
CREW.

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PAGE 02 TUNIS 07307 02 OF 02 270852Z

PASSENGERS INTERROGATED AFTER THEIR RELEASE
SPOKE VERY FAVORABLY OF HIJACKERS. THEY CLAIMED
HIJACKERS WERE CONSIDERATE AND FRIENDLY. ONE
PASSENGER SAID HIJACKERS WERE PARTICULARLY ATTENTIVE
TO THE BABIES ON BOARD. WHEN INTEROGATOR CALLED ATTENTION
TO BRUTAL KILLING OF GERMAN PASSENGER, THE CONSENSUS
RESPONSE WAS, "THE HIJACKERS APOLOGIZED TO US FOR THAT".
CLOSE TIE WAS ALSO ESTABLISHED BETWEEN HIJACKERS AND
PLANE CREW DESPITE FACT THAT PILOT WAS INFORMED BY
HIJACKERS THAT MEMBER OF CREW WOULD BE SHOT BEFORE
HIJACKERS UNDERTOOK EXTREME MEASURE OF BLOWING UP AIRCRAFT
WITH ALL ABOARD. UPON DISEMBARKING FROM PLANE, TWO PILOTS
AND FLIGHT ENGINEER WERE SEEN SHAKING HAND CORDIALLY WITH
DISEMBARKING TERRORISTS. CAPTAIN HAS STATED
HE MADE SPECIAL EFFORT TO ESTABLISH RAPPORT WITH HIJACKERS.
HE TOLD PRESS THAT HE SOUGHT TO CALM NERVOUS HIJACKERS BY
ASSERTING THAT EVERYTHING WOULD WORK OUT AND THAT THEIR
DEMANDS WOULD EVENTUALLY BE MET. HE TOLD THEM THAT IF
THEY WOULD BE REASONABLE AND SAVE THE LIVES OF INNOCENT
PEOPLE, THEY WOULD ADVANCE THEIR CAUSE. OTHERWISE THE
REVERSE WOULD OCCUR.

6. BRITISH ROLE. JAMES CRAIG OF THE FOREIGN OFFICE
AND ROSS STATEMAN OF BRITISH AIRWAYS WORKED CLOSELY WITH
TUNISIAN AUTHORITIES. BRITISH OFFICIALS SOUGHT TO
PERSUADE TUNISIANS TO FIND WAY TO BEND TO HIJACKER
DEMANDS AND AFTERWARDS FOLLOW "BROKEN PROMISE" POLICY,
I.E., INCARCERATE THEM. THEY ALSO PERSUADED BELKHODJA
TO EMPHASIZE TO HIJACKERS DURING FINAL STAGE OF NEGOTIATIONS
NECESSITY THAT ALL POSSIBLE STEPS BE TAKEN TO AVOID
INADVERTENTLY BLOWING UP AIRCRAFT. MOST POIGNANT
EXCHANGE WAS THAT BETWEEN STATEMAN AND PILOT OVER VOICE
RADIO FIVE MINUTES BEFORE 8 AM MONDAY MORNING DEADLINE
WHEN PILOT SIAD, "IF IT COMES TO THE WORST, PLEASE TAKE CARE
OF OUR FAMILIES, AS I KNOW YOU WILL." SECRETARY OF
STATE CALLAGHAN CALLED CRAIG AFTERWARDS TO CONGRATULATE
HIM ON "SUCCESS".

7. ROLE OF OTHER ARAB GOVERNMENTS. PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA
SOUGHT ASSISTANCE OF BOUMEDIENE AND KING HASSAN IN SEEKING
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PAGE 03 TUNIS 07307 02 OF 02 270852Z

TO PERSUADE PRESIDENT SADAT TO RELEASE 13 TERRORISTS
HELD IN CAIRO. HE ALSO TALKED TO SADAT DIRECTLY. IN
COURSE OF SUNDAY NIGHT, AFTER HIJACKERS RELUCTANTLY
EXTENDED THEIR DEADLINE UNTIL MONDAY MORNING, ALL LOCAL
ARAB AMBASSADORS WERE CONVENED AT AIRPORT WHERE TUNISIANS
ENDEAVORED TO FIND ARAB COUNTRY THAT WOULD ACCEPT PLANE
WITH 11 TERRORISTS ABOARD. SPECIAL EFFORT WAS MADE WITH

IRAQIS, WHOSE EMBASSY SUNDAY NIGHT WAS HUM OF ACTIVITY. DURING PRESS CONFERENCE FOREIGN MINISTER CHATTI ANNOUNCED THAT THESE EFFORTS HAD BEEN UNAVAILING. TUNISIANS CONTEND THAT THEIR DECISION TO LET HIJACKERS GET OFF PLANE AND STAY IN TUNISIA WAS INFLUENCED BY OUTSIDE ARAB GOVERNMENT PRESSURES. WHILE ALL ARAB GOVERNMENTS PUBLICLY CONDEMNED HIJACKING OPERATION, NONE APPARENTLY ADVOCATED RISKING EXPLOSION OF AIRCRAFT WITH 11 PALESTINIANS AND THREE ENGLISHMEN INSIDE.

8. ROLE OF THE MINISTER OF INTERIOR. WE WERE IMPRESSED WITH THE WAY IN WHICH MINISTER OF INTERIOR BELKHODJA HANDLED HIJACKERS. HE ALTERNATELY COAXED AND LECTURED THEM STERNLY, DEPENDING UPON SITUATION AND HIJACKERS' MOODS. HIJACKERS BECAME EXTREMELY RESPECTFUL OF HIM AND IN AT LEAST THREE INSTANCES BENT TO HIS URGINGS FOR POSTPONEMENT OF DEADLINES. BELKHODJA MAINTAINED HIS COMPOSURE THROUGHOUT AND PUNCTUATED HIS ARGUMENTS WITH FLOWERY ARABIC EXPRESSIONS OF FRIENDSHIP FOR HIS "BRETHREN" ON BOARD THE PLANE. FROM WHAT WE HEARD OVER THE RADIO, ABU IYAD SEEMED LESS EFFECTIVE, ALTHOUGH TUNISIANS GIVE HIM CREDIT FOR HAVING PLAYED A KEY ROLE IN BREAKING ORIGINAL DEADLOCK.

9. WERE HIJACKERS DEADLY SERIOUS? WHILE IT HAS BEEN DISCOVERED THAT NO EXPLOSIVE DEVICES WERE INSTALLED ON AIRCRAFT AFTER ALL, PILOT IS CONVINCED THAT TERRORISTS WOULD HAVE BLOWN UP AIRCRAFT (WITH GRENADES) HAD THEY NOT RPT NOT BEEN ALLOWED TO REMAIN IN TUNISIA. THE EXCITED AND EMOTIONAL RANTINGS OVER THE RADIO OF THE HIJACKERS AT CRITICAL MOMENTS BEFORE EACH DEADLINE INDEED SUGGEST THAT THEY WERE DEADLY SERIOUS.

10. WHAT HAPPENS NEXT? THIS IS SUBJECT OF SEPTTEL.
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PAGE 04 TUNIS 07307 02 OF 02 270852Z

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